

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

To determine Medicare beneficiaries' awareness and use of the Health Care Financing Administration's *Guide to Choosing a Nursing Home* and *Guide to Health Insurance for People with Medicare*.

BACKGROUND

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, Department of Health and Human Services, asked us to examine departmental strategies for distributing various reports and publications to ensure they are received by intended users. As part of a 1993 Medicare beneficiary satisfaction survey, we asked 1257 randomly selected beneficiaries about their awareness and use of two Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) booklets that provide guidance to Medicare beneficiaries and their families.

These two booklets guide Medicare beneficiaries on factors to consider when selecting (1) a nursing home, and (2) health insurance to supplement Medicare coverage (often referred to as Medigap insurance). According to HCFA, both booklets are available from local Social Security offices and senior citizen organizations.

FINDINGS

Few beneficiaries were aware of or used the HCFA guides

- Nine percent of the beneficiaries surveyed were aware of the *Guide to Choosing a Nursing Home*, and one percent had used it.
- Fourteen percent of the beneficiaries surveyed were aware of the *Guide to Health Insurance for People with Medicare*, and two percent had used it.

Beneficiaries who used the booklets found them useful

Most beneficiaries stated they would use the booklets if they needed nursing home care or Medigap insurance

- Eighty-four percent of the beneficiaries surveyed said they would use the *Guide to Choosing a Nursing Home* should they need to select a nursing home.
- Sixty-five percent of the beneficiaries surveyed said they would use the *Guide to Health Insurance for People with Medicare* should they need to obtain or change supplemental health insurance.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that HCFA work with the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs to develop a more effective strategy to make the guides available to beneficiaries.

AGENCY COMMENTS

The Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs (ASPA), Commissioner of Social Security, and HCFA Administrator commented on our draft report. Appendix B shows the full text of their comments.

All agreed with our recommendation and have already begun exploring strategies to make HCFA guides more accessible to beneficiaries. For example, HCFA and SSA staff are working together to determine ways to improve access to Medicare information. HCFA staff have also been considering the feasibility of making the guides available through hospitals and physicians. ASPA suggests that the Department advertise the guides through senior citizen groups and public service announcements.